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ABSTRACT

This document is intended to assist local authorities in England and Wales who are interested in forming local strategic partnerships (LSPs) with the community and voluntary sectors. Section 1 presents the following guidelines for LSPs when developing a community strategy to meet local priorities: (1) have each local area prepare a plan to improve community cohesion; (2) prepare a communication strategy that enables community cohesion plans to be articulated; and (3) draw up a communications strategy that ensures fuller understanding of the LSP's programs and priorities. Section 2 discusses the following aspects of developing an inclusive LSP: (1) community development and participation and involving Black and minority ethnic communities; (2) defining the voluntary and community sectors and understanding their impact; (3) working with the voluntary and community sectors; (4) the voluntary and community sector infrastructure; and (5) other mechanisms for involvement in LSPs; and (6) decision making and executive bodies. Section 3 explains why council members should be involved in LSPs, and Section 4 presents guidelines for working with the community and voluntary sectors in the 88 areas that are eligible for the Neighborhood Renewal Fund. Six case studies and a list of six contact organizations and three recommended publications are included. (MN)

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learning from local strategic partnerships

LGA advice note for working with the community and voluntary sectors

March 2002

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Bassac, The British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres

BNRRN, The Black Neighbourhood Renewal and Regeneration Network

NACVS, National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service

Urban Forum, An umbrella body for community and voluntary groups with interests in urban policy and regional policy.

VOSCUR, The Voluntary Organisations Standing Conference on Urban Regeneration in Bristol.

The LGA also gratefully acknowledges the help of local authority officer advisers:

Neil Stott, Head of Community Development, Canterbury City Council and Robert McMullen, Strategy Adviser, Chester-le-Street District Council

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In June 2001 the Local Government Association (LGA) with community and voluntary sector input from members of the Community Development Forum produced an advice note on working with the community and voluntary sector on local strategic partnerships (LSPs). *Effective local strategic partnerships - LGA advice note for working with the community and voluntary sectors* was sent to every authority in the country. It has been well received by people across all sectors.

The June 2001 advice note gave local authorities and the community and voluntary sector some early signposts to developing an effective LSP. It stressed that LSPs will operate in the wider context of local government modernisation with links to Best Value, well-being, community leadership, the new statutory duty to prepare a community strategy and the requirement to review decision making arrangements and introduce new forms of invigorating local democracy and participation.

Effective local strategic partnerships highlighted the following issues:

- **spend time** to get to know partners, create a culture and dialogue in which the contribution of all partners and the wider community is valued;
- **build** on existing partnerships and draw together overlapping local partnerships and plans;
- **hone** negotiation skills, reaching decisions through collaboration and acknowledging other demands placed upon representatives of other organisations;
- **develop** a culture of learning and capacity building for all sectors;
- **get to know** your local community and voluntary sector infrastructure to reveal gaps; and
- **help raise the capacity** of local community and voluntary groups and respect their access to unique resources including trusts and volunteers.

LSPs should involve and reflect the local community; they should work with representative umbrella forums where they exist and officers working on community involvement issues. Tenants and residents organisations and local councils of faith or inter-faith networks are also useful.

Accountability of LSP representatives is an issue for all sectors. It should be possible to agree mechanisms for selecting representatives that are open and transparent with robust reporting back and communications strategies.

Resource needs that local authorities could support include core funding, asset bases, in-kind resources, supporting volunteers, learning and capacity building resources and match funding. Consideration should be given to the payment of expenses and travel costs for community representatives and other allowances.

LSPs will require effective servicing to facilitate partnership working and to alert the LSP to problems created which could undermine achievements. There will be a need for recourse to mediation in some cases.

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Having identified some key factors at the outset of LSP development, this follow-up advice note now attempts to provide further guidance in the light of early experiences.

Government guidance referred to throughout this document is *Local Strategic Partnerships - Government Guidance* published by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in March 2001.

community strategies - local priorities

The Local Government Act 2000 requires local authorities to prepare a community strategy to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of their area, putting them at the heart of the governance of their localities. Community strategies are expected to provide an integrated approach to the sustainable economic, social and physical development of the cities, towns and rural areas across England and Wales and should include:

- a long term vision for the area, focusing on *outcomes* that are to be achieved;
- an action plan identifying shorter-term priorities and activities that will contribute to the achievement of long-term outcomes; and
- a shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so.

Crucially, the community strategy must also include arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the action plan for periodically reviewing the community strategy - and most importantly, for reporting progress to local people.

Recent LGA research indicates that 79 per cent of councils expect to have published a community strategy by March 2002.* Local authorities see the development of community strategies as an important opportunity to increase links with partners, with 93 per cent seeing this as being important for working with the voluntary and community sector.

**Follow the leaders - a survey of local authority approaches to community leadership (November 2001)*

LSPs in the 88 urban and rural areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund must also produce a framework Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy by April 2002 as a condition of funding. These strategies should form a component of the overall community strategy. However, all authorities in England and Wales are encouraged to develop a local neighbourhood renewal strategy with the LSP as part of their community strategy.

It will be important to note the recommendations for addressing the social, racial and cultural divisions that may exist in communities, as set out in the Ted Cantle report *The Community Cohesion Review Team Report* and the John Denham report *Building Cohesive Communities* following public disturbances in some towns and cities in the summer of 2001 (see background reading).

The Ted Cantle report made 66 recommendations, many in line with LGA thinking and already being addressed in local authorities. They include that:

- as part of the community strategy, each local area should prepare a plan to improve community cohesion, following a local debate;
- a communication strategy should be prepared which enables community cohesion plans to be articulated; and
- LSPs should also draw up a communications strategy that ensures a much fuller understanding of its programmes and priorities. This should include a training package for LSP members and formal links to a network of community organisations.

Key to the success of LSPs will be their ability to use mainstream funding more effectively and in a more co-ordinated way. The structures and mechanisms that are appropriate in each area will depend on local circumstances - including, for example,

whether there is an existing strategic partnership and whether there is a community and voluntary sector infrastructure.

It will be important for them to build relationships with existing specialist partnership bodies, for example Community Legal Service Partnerships – which themselves have been tasked with assessing the extent of need for legal and advice services in their area and how well current service provision meets this. There may be many elements of community consultation and planning in existence, for example village appraisals and community plans. The LSP should take account of the need to connect neighbourhood governance and plans with the work of the LSP.

In a crowded policy agenda, LSPs have huge potential for tapping in to all the needs and aspirations of local communities. The local government white paper (December 2001) recognises the efforts made by local authorities and their partners in establishing LSPs and in particular recognises the key community leadership role played by councils in setting up LSPs.

It is widely recognised that making real and lasting improvements to local services will take some time. What also needs to be taken into account is that for all those concerned in trying to make those improvements through the LSP, a culture change will be needed. Previously the relationship between a local authority and the community and voluntary sector may have been dominated by grant making and consultation processes with an almost inevitable emphasis on giver and receiver and the tensions inherent in that relationship.

Where LSPs are building on existing partnerships, there will need to be a re-negotiation of the role each of the partners is expected to play and the way the partnership operates. Robust reporting back and communication strategies for all representatives on an LSP are of primary importance. This is particularly so when partners are acting as representatives of diffuse and diverse sectors that have no established communication links at the current time. It should not be assumed that attendance at a meeting automatically means that a link is created into the complex organisational structures of each partner or the diversity of membership of each sector.

The LSP should consider payment of expenses and travel costs to community representatives. It is difficult for local and unpaid community representatives and community groups to pay costs especially as in many rural areas travel costs can be expensive.

LSPs should consider setting up a specific pot of money to cover costs and travel expenses incurred by representatives of residents, and the community and voluntary sectors sitting on the LSP, especially those LSPs in the areas where the community and voluntary sectors are not receiving Community Empowerment Fund money.

Helpful lessons could be learned from the various other forms of working together that most areas have experience of in recent times. Single Regeneration Budget bids, or developing a local compact, for example, should provide experience of ways of working together which respect the different traditions of decision making, accountability and representation.

Case study
The Gloucester Partnership

Type of authority: district council
Region: south west
Other details: not a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

The Gloucester Partnership is a new partnership, developed to determine and deliver the community strategy for Gloucester City, as well as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. It is the local strategic partnership (LSP) for Gloucester.

Setting up the partnership

The Gloucester Partnership has been in existence since October 2001, but its origins date back to a community strategy conference in March 2001. This was a joint conference held by Gloucester City Council and Gloucester Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) that brought together all the key partners in the city to inform them of the community strategy and LSP agenda. As a result of this conference the LSP steering group was formed, involving 12-14 major organisations. The steering group was tasked to develop proposals for Gloucester City's LSP.

Over 300 organisations were consulted about the proposals for development of the LSP. Gloucester City Council and Gloucester CVS then took the lead role in setting up the partnership. However, other key organisations were involved, such as the police service, health authority, Government Office for the South West, Learning and Skills Council, University of Gloucestershire, Wildlife Trust and the Employment Service.

Each member of the Gloucester Partnership signed up on the understanding that they represent their own organisation or sector, and are accountable to them.

Structure

The Gloucester Partnership has an executive body of between 12 and 17 members, a number agreed to keep the body to a manageable size. Both Gloucester CVS and the Race Equality Council for Gloucestershire are standing members of the executive. Additionally, six community representatives, selected by the community and voluntary sector, are on the executive, with a minimum of one from a black and minority ethnic voluntary group.

The executive meets as an open meeting: it is open to all partners and members of the public to attend as observers. The executive meets at least once every three months, and has delegated responsibility for taking decisions on behalf of the main partnership. It reports all decisions back to the partnership, and is committed to ensuring that, even if an organisation does not sit on the executive, its voice will still be heard.

The Gloucester Partnership is currently working on the development of Priority Action Groups. These will be the 'doing' groups of the partnership. The executive has agreed three priorities for the partnership in its first year:

- working together;
- Westgate ward;
- young people.

Membership of these groups is currently being established. It will include a wide range of people, including voluntary and community sector representatives, and the aim is to develop a more joined up way of working.

Resources

The partnership as a whole meets in conference three times a year, to receive and comment on reports of progress made with the work programme.

The partnership has a rotating chair. The deputy leader of Gloucester City Council currently chairs it, and a voluntary sector representative is vice chair.

At present, Gloucester City Council provides the secretariat function for the partnership. However, it is proposed that the Gloucester Partnership will have its own support in future, funded by the partnership itself.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

A separate voluntary and community sector conference was held prior to the establishment of Gloucester Partnership, to enable organisations to consider the issues and draft proposals from the steering group, as well as to agree job descriptions for the voluntary sector representatives and conduct democratic elections for those representatives.

Now, over 50 organisations are signed up to the aims of the partnership. Of these, just under a third are voluntary or community sector bodies:

Art Shape Ltd;
British Red Cross;
Gloucester CVS;
Gloucestershire Chinese Women's Guild;
Gloucester Hindu Association;
Gloucester Law Centre;
Gloucestershire Deaf Association;
Gloucestershire Lifestyles;
Gloucester Tenants Federation;
Linking Communities – the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector network;
Race Equality Council for Gloucestershire;
Three Bridges Partnership (a neighbourhood partnership);
White City Neighbourhood Management Partnership Pathfinder;
White City Project;
Young Gloucestershire.

Gloucester City Council is not eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding or, therefore, for the Community Empowerment Fund. Currently the city council makes grants to a wide range of voluntary and community groups (8 per cent of its general budget, a total of £1m). The council also has a Neighbourhood Partnerships Budget, which supports the work of the LSP and has set aside specific LSP development funds for 2002/03.

Gloucester CVS provides infrastructure support to the voluntary and community groups, over 400 of them, operating within the city. It has played a key role in the development of an inclusive LSP and in supporting the full and democratic involvement of the voluntary and community sector representatives. However, Gloucester CVS is facing a funding crisis and the future of the sector's role within the LSP is in jeopardy. The council is currently considering ways to further support the local CVS.

Relationships

Links with local neighbourhood-based partnerships have been formalised through the inclusion of the community representatives on the Gloucester Partnership.

One of the key themes for Gloucester Partnership, 'working together', will involve identifying appropriate communication mechanisms for reporting to the community. In the meantime, the partnership reports via regular mailings, and the local newspaper. It is also intended that a 'compact' between the voluntary sector and all LSP partners will be developed as part of the 'working together' theme. An initial 'partnership protocol' has been developed, which will form the basis for this work.

Links with community and voluntary groups who are not directly on the partnership are encouraged via the networks run by Gloucester CVS, and by planned involvement on the Priority Action Groups. Conferences and seminars are also planned throughout the year, to involve a wider range of partners, and the voluntary sector newsletter keeps groups informed of the partnership's work.

Role of councillors

As the chair of the executive is an elected member, and the vice chair is a voluntary sector representative, they work closely together on the development of the partnership. As smaller Policy Action Groups are set up, the role of councillors working with the voluntary and community sector is likely to be examined more closely. It seems probable that local councillors will work much more closely with voluntary and community sector representatives in future, particularly for various consultations that are planned.

Overall local authority perspective

The involvement of the community and voluntary sector in the Gloucester Partnership has been invaluable. From the start the strong leadership from the city council and Gloucester CVS helped to steer the development of the partnership. A high level of commitment was needed, and this was given from the beginning.

The council places a lot of importance on the voluntary and community sectors' involvement in the partnership, and recognises it is required if the partnership is to be successful. More work still needs to be done to aid their involvement, and this will be carried out as the partnership continues to develop.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

The setting up was a partnership between the local authority and the voluntary sector from the beginning, which reflects the vital role that the sector plays within the social inclusion agenda.

However, now that the partnership has been established, there is a need for additional core and strategic funding, to enable the voluntary and community sectors to continue their involvement fully. Support, training, information and advice are needed, so that the representatives can participate and contribute freely.

Contacts:

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Community development and participation

The active engagement of local people in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods and local authority area is central to the government's approach to urban and rural regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, community strategies and other interlinked agendas. The development of community and neighbourhood strategies needs to be approached in ways that encourage real community participation at the local level.

In the past traditional methods of consultation have often been regarded by local people as tokenistic. Effective participation approaches seek to unlock the knowledge and creativity of local people. Working with community and voluntary organisations, local authorities and other public agencies involved in the LSP should work together to provide mechanisms for effective community participation in devising, implementing and evaluating community and neighbourhood strategies. Many of these partners employ community workers/community development workers who can aid the process. Where such workers are not employed, partner organisations should consider training local people in community development skills and funding relevant posts to help facilitate meaningful participation.

Focusing on developing an inclusive LSP should help to establish the new culture of learning and capacity building for all sectors and create a climate of tolerance/flexibility and innovation. It is also crucial to remember that special steps might be needed to include individuals and groups that have been marginalised in the past. This includes, for example, holding meetings in premises fully accessible to disabled people and producing written materials in a range of formats.

The needs of socially excluded people in rural areas where they are more thinly spread can be very different from those in urban areas. Their dispersal can compound isolation and lack of access to services and organisations. There are special challenges for LSPs in rural areas. The relationship between the LSP and parish councils needs to be carefully considered. Parish councils are the first tier of local government in rural areas. They are often the first port of call for local people with reference to the delivery of services. They are increasingly being expected to develop their own neighbourhood plans as a result of local community consultation. These will be important plans to be fed into the LSPs. The inter-relationship between parish councils and community and voluntary organisations in their areas should be part of that consideration.

The Community Empowerment Fund, available in the 88 local authority areas eligible for the Neighbourhood and Renewal Fund, is unlikely to meet all the needs of residents, community and voluntary sectors in becoming effective players in the LSP and in neighbourhood renewal. This work could usefully be supported by community development wok through local authorities and partner agencies, in response to the needs and ideas of the community network.

Case study
The Herefordshire Partnership

Type of authority: unitary council
Region: west midlands
Other details: rural authority, not a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

The Herefordshire Partnership started life as a New Commitment to Regeneration Pathfinder partnership. It has been in existence since 1998, and is the local strategic partnership for Herefordshire.

Setting up the partnership

A group of organisations led the setting up of the partnership. These were Herefordshire Council, a number of voluntary and community sector organisations (through Herefordshire Development Agencies Network), Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and Training and Enterprise Council, Herefordshire Health Authority and West Mercia Constabulary. Advantage West Midlands had observer status during this process.

Structure

There are three levels to the Herefordshire Partnership: the board, the management group, and a range of ambition groups. The board and management group are seen as the facilitation and co-ordination arms of the partnership. The task of driving forward the plan lies with the ambition groups, which are the engines for development within the partnership.

The management group mirrors the membership of the board, and deals with the day-to-day co-ordination of the partnership and partnership development. The board oversees the strategic direction of the partnership, and acts as a port of call to sort out obstacles to success.

Partner organisations have agreed to delegate decisions to ambition groups. Currently, there are 11 ambition groups, and membership of all but one includes representatives from voluntary and community sector organisations (see figure in brackets):

Health and social care (3);
Community safety (0);
Transport (3);
Cultural consortium (2);

Housing (6);
Countryside and environment (10);
Community development and rural services (3);
Business economic development and tourism (2);
Education and learning (6);
Social inclusion (7);
ICT strategy (5).

Resources

The board meets every two months, while the management group meets every month. Ambition groups vary in the regularity of their meetings, but all chairs of ambition groups meet quarterly. Once a year, the entire partnership as a whole meets in conference.

The chairs of the different groups are drawn from various sectors: currently the board chair is from West Mercia Constabulary whilst the chair of the management group is from the voluntary/community sector. Chairs of ambition groups vary.

Herefordshire Council provides the secretariat for the board, while the management group has a secretariat provided by Herefordshire Partnership itself. Various partner bodies facilitate the ambition groups. Funding for the secretariat function comes largely from Herefordshire Council budgets, but there are significant contributions from the Learning and Skills Council, West Mercia Constabulary and Advantage West Midlands.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

Currently, 109 organisations are represented on the board, management group and ambition groups of Herefordshire Partnership. Of these, two-fifths are voluntary or community sector bodies:

Age Concern;
Association for the Promotion of Herefordshire;
Bromyard Area Voluntary Action;
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers;
Community First Herefordshire & Worcestershire;
Community Health Council;
Country Landowners Association;
Council for the Protection of Rural England;
Disability Network Group;
Early Years Partnership;
Friends of the Earth;
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group;
Governors Association;
Greengate Network;
Hereford Access For All Committee;

Herefordshire Development Agencies Network;
Herefordshire and Worcester Gardens Trust;
Herefordshire and Worcestershire Regionally Important Geological Sites Group;
Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureau;
Herefordshire Carers Support;
Herefordshire Community Care Alliance;
Herefordshire Diocese;
Herefordshire Housing Associations;
Herefordshire Nature Trust;
Herefordshire Travellers Support Group;
Holme Lacy College;
Herefordshire User Involvement Steering Group;
John Masefield Community College;
KC3;
Land and Environment Centre;
Malvern Hills AONB;
Marches Energy Agency;
Marches Housing Association;
Marches Woodland Initiative;
National Farmers Union;
National Trust;
RC Diocese;
Ross and District Community Development Group;
Rotherwas Access Group;
The Housing Corporation;
The Leadership Trust Foundation;
The Marches Consortium ;
Transport 2000;
Travellers Support Group;
Voluntary Action - North Herefordshire.

The Herefordshire area is not eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (and hence it is not eligible for the Community Empowerment Fund). The partnership support budgets allow for some recompense to voluntary and community sector representatives, such as expenses for attending meetings. In addition, Herefordshire Partnership pools training resources across the public agencies and with the voluntary sector. The partnership is planning to provide assistance with information sharing across the partnership, via its successful SRB *Herefordshire in Touch* ICT programme.

The voluntary sector in Herefordshire is in the process of setting up a Voluntary Sector Assembly. The assembly co-ordinator has the specific brief to facilitate the involvement of voluntary sector bodies in the work of Herefordshire Partnership. As part of this, the Voluntary Sector Assembly will include bursaries for representatives to take part in Herefordshire Partnership meetings, as well as professional training and support to enable representatives to fully engage in partnership work. Herefordshire Development Agencies Network secured funding from the Home Office for this.

Herefordshire Council part funds the Herefordshire Development Agencies, and has service level agreements with each. These agreements are increasingly likely to be focused on meeting partnership targets. In addition, the wider voluntary sector is engaged in delivering partnership activity through its involvement in the ambition groups.

Voluntary sector representatives are currently engaged in developing a 'compact' with the partnership. It is likely that the Voluntary Sector Assembly will build on this work.

Community sector participation is overseen by the council's community involvement co-ordinator. There is a programme of work involved in this, including the community planning programme, a citizens panel, a communications strategy, and involvement of specific target groups, such as young people and other 'hard to reach' groups who would not normally be engaged.

Relationships

The partnership has no formal links with local neighbourhood-based partnerships yet. However, the ambition groups are in the process of building more formal relationships with geographic communities, and as part of this they are establishing clearer links with local area forums, town and parish councils, town regeneration partnerships and locality-based voluntary forums.

The partnership reports back to the local community through the links with geographic community forums and councils. In addition, they provide information in leaflets, newsletters and on a website, and through the local media and the community involvement programme.

Links with community and voluntary groups who are not directly on the partnership board are through ambition groups. Many of them have 'network' or 'associate' members, who receive information, are consulted and are invited to special events. Also, a number of these voluntary and community groups are involved in projects that are sponsored by the partnership.

Herefordshire Development Agencies Network also has a news sheet called *The Link*, which is used to discuss issues relating to the voluntary sector, and invite comment from a wider range of organisations.

Role of councillors

There is no direct mechanism by which councillors have a relationship with voluntary and community sector representatives as part of the partnership. However, the councillors do work with the voluntary and community sector on the ambition groups, and sometimes through local area forums. Some councillors are also on the management committees of voluntary groups.

Overall local authority perspective

The voluntary and community sector is a key part of Herefordshire Partnership, and a key resource for the county. Representatives from this sector often represent the partnership at regional and national events, particularly those on the board and management groups, and the chairs of ambition groups.

There are difficulties for the voluntary and community sectors in terms of 'representation', and the partnership has worked hard to enable the widest possible network through which ideas and information can flow, in order to make the most of the variety and expertise available in the sector. The development of the Voluntary Sector Assembly should really help develop the relationship of the wider network of organisations with the partnership structures.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

The voluntary and community sector involvement in Herefordshire Partnership has been successful, but with some limitations. These limitations are mainly to do with the restricted resources of time and money. Some voluntary organisations do not see the partnership's strategic role as particularly relevant to their prime service delivery focus. In addition, there is a perception that key, public sector players dominate the agenda.

However, the involvement of the sector in the initial consultation phase which led to the drawing up of the plan was substantial: the challenge now is to maintain that engagement and enthusiasm. The Voluntary Sector Assembly will play an important part here in maintaining and increasing involvement, though limited resources for participation is likely to remain a big issue. Voluntary organisations are usually funded for service delivery and do not have the capacity for extensive strategic partnership working.

Ensuring that the voluntary and community sector is effectively engaged in the development and delivery of the Herefordshire Plan will continue to present the partnership with a real challenge. Future service level agreements with voluntary organisations will need to reflect and resource this partnership engagement in order to ensure the effective long-term involvement of the sector.

Herefordshire Partnership is moving in the right direction, and is ready to meet the new challenges ahead.

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Involving the black and minority ethnic communities

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) has stressed the involvement of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities as central to the effectiveness of neighbourhood renewal. These changes have the potential to be very positive but do require efforts to ensure the active involvement of BME communities.

NRU research has highlighted the issue of poor public services in deprived areas. Compared to the rest of the country deprived areas have higher crime, poorer health and poorer schools. The experiences in deprived areas of BME communities are stark. NRU statistics show that:

- one third of Pakistani and Bangladeshi households live in unfit, largely private, properties and around a quarter suffer from over-crowding;
- only 30 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils achieve 5 A-C grades at GCSE;
- the death rate for heart disease of 20-30 year old Asians is twice as high as that for the rest of the population; and
- black people are three times more likely to be diagnosed as having schizophrenia than others - yet are less likely to be given counselling.

Traditional economic development and regeneration programmes have often failed to make any sustained impact on the problems of social exclusion of BME communities. Part of the reason for this is that BME community and voluntary sectors have not been properly involved in partnership or had their needs addressed in a meaningful way. Additional support mechanisms may be needed to support them to engage effectively.

All partners in the LSP, including those in the community and voluntary sector, can take a number of simple steps to address institutional discrimination:

- ensure that decision making processes are inclusive - this may mean ensuring that additional support is made available to help traditionally excluded groups to participate and that information and communication is appropriate;

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- ensure that any policies, systems and guidelines are also inclusive; and

- ensure that appropriate training and induction is provided for LSP members.

Case study
Lambeth Local Strategic Partnership

Type of authority: London borough
Region: London
Other details: a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

Lambeth's Local Strategic Partnership is so new that it does not yet have an agreed name, although the development process has taken 15 months. It was developed through extensive consultation and collaboration with a range of existing partnerships in Lambeth.

Setting up the partnership

The first event that brought a wide range of partners and stakeholders together, to raise awareness and discuss community planning and the LSP, was a conference in November 2000. Key messages that came from the event were:

- be inclusive;
- don't rush it;
- make sure the voluntary sector can play an equal part;
- build on existing work and good practice, such as town centre forums;
- move away from the 'them and us' mentality.

As a result of this event, the council moved its target for producing a community strategy back, until the LSP is up and running and has agreed a timescale for its production, and launched a major consultation process to a wide range of partners and agencies operating in Lambeth. In May 2001, agencies and partners were invited to an LSP workshop, to discuss the development of the partnership, and their role in it. A total of 66 people attended the event, which used independent facilitators, and aimed to:

- build understanding and awareness of community planning, the LSP, and how it might affect organisations in Lambeth;
- make recommendations as to who should be on the LSP, for consideration by the London Borough of Lambeth;
- consider possible structures for the LSP.

Key messages were that the partnership should not be dominated by the council, there should be 50 per cent voluntary and community sector representation, the board should be big enough to be truly inclusive, the diversity of the borough should be represented, young people should be involved, the partnership should bring people together and break down barriers, and the partnership must operate in a learning manner.

Following the event, it became clear that there was still a long way to go, and that the council needed to work more closely with other agencies to develop the LSP. This led to the establishment of an interim body, the shadow LSP, which operated from July 2001. The shadow LSP, made up of around 30 representatives from a range of organisations and agencies, continued to work on the development of the LSP, the process for developing a local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, and a strategy for communicating the work of the LSP. Smaller working groups also contributed to this work, often involving organisations outside the shadow LSP, and often including front-line staff with every-day experience of the issues that were being discussed.

In December 2001 the shadow LSP agreed proposals for a full LSP, and in January 2002 the council's Policy Committee approved these. The permanent LSP will meet for the first time in March 2002.

Structure

There are 22 fixed places on the partnership, and these cover ten themes: crime, health, education, employment, housing and environment, voluntary sector, faith, tenants, service users, and a holistic overview. The representatives for these themes are agreed by specific organisations, agencies and partnerships. For example, the community safety partnership selects the crime representatives (at least one of which is from the police services), and Lambeth Voluntary Action Council selects two voluntary sector service providers, as well as having a seat itself. In addition to these 22 places, there are up to five extra places reserved to fill 'diversity gaps'. These are available to ensure that the full range of expertise and experiences are represented, and could include representatives from black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people, or any other significant gaps left once the other 22 places are allocated. The community network selects these extra representatives.

Lambeth Local Strategic Partnership does not have an executive body, and so far decisions have been taken via action-based sub-groups, workshops, strategy days, discussions and facilitated meetings. It is likely that sub-groups will be set up in the future. The view of the shadow LSP was that, once Lambeth Local Strategic Partnership is fully operational, it will include existing statutory and non-statutory partnerships, working groups, select committees set up to consider particular service-delivery issues, the Tenants Council and Town Centre Forums. In addition, there may well be other new structures, created specifically to fill identified gaps, such as service delivery-focused groups.

Resources

As the partnership is new, it will meet on a monthly basis initially. It is probable that these meetings will become less frequent when the sub-groups have been established.

Up until now the meetings have been independently facilitated, so there has been no chair. The chairing arrangements will be agreed at the forthcoming meeting.

At present, the London Borough of Lambeth provides the secretariat function for the partnership. However, it is proposed that Lambeth Local Strategic Partnership will establish a multi-agency support team in future. This team will involve officers from the main public service agencies, the voluntary sector and business. The officers will be on part-time secondments to the support team, and extra funding will come from the larger public sector agencies.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

Of the 22 fixed places on the partnership, half (11of them) are from the voluntary or community sector:

Housing Association;
Lambeth Multi-faith Group;
Lambeth Voluntary Action Council;
Tenants Council;
Town centre forum chairs (five of these);
Voluntary sector service providers (yet to be selected).

In addition, there are the extra five 'diversity gaps' places, which will be selected by the community network.

Lambeth is a Neighbourhood Renewal area, and £44,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund has been allocated to Lambeth Voluntary Action Council for development of the community network.

In addition, London Borough of Lambeth has established nine community development posts across the town centre forums, as well as providing support for capacity building through targeted Neighbourhood Renewal Fund schemes such as 'Community Champions'. This is an initiative focused on key individuals in excluded communities who can, with a little support, help their communities through mentoring, outreach and specific IT projects (Lambeth are piloting this on one of their estates).

In future years the LSP is likely to allocate Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to the voluntary and community sector, to enable them to continue participating fully in the partnership.

Relationships

Responsibilities and tasks are shared out amongst all the partners: this work is often assigned based on the skills of the partners, or by volunteering. Members of the partnership board represent not only their own sector, but also have a 'portfolio' of other sectors: they shadow one or two other partners on the board, from other sectors, in order to gain an understanding of what those partners do. For example, the leader of the council is shortly spending the day at the Lambeth Voluntary Action Council, to get a better feel for their work.

Links with community and voluntary groups who are not directly on the partnership are via stakeholder events. Two Neighbourhood Renewal strategy events have been held in the first part of this year, and further events are planned in June. As sub-groups are set up there are likely to be further opportunities to involve a wider range of community and voluntary sector partner organisations.

Links with local neighbourhood-based partnerships have been formalised through the inclusion of five town centre forum chairs. Again, as sub-groups are set up, there is likely to be even greater involvement of community representatives.

Reporting back to the local community is via the LSP website, through reports to town centre forums, and through a newsletter and bulletins. Lambeth Local Strategic Partnership is developing a communications strategy to improve feedback to the community, partners and other stakeholders in future.

Role of councillors

One of the councillors has a 'communities' portfolio, and attends all the meetings of the LSP. Her portfolio also means that she often works with a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations outside the meetings as well.

Overall local authority perspective

Community and voluntary sector involvement is crucial to the partnership; and so far the community and voluntary sector representatives have shown an amazing energy, ownership and commitment to the LSP. Individuals have given up a lot of time to genuinely get the partnership, and its ethos of inclusiveness, right from the kick-off.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

The Lambeth Voluntary Action Council has been active in the partnership on behalf of the voluntary sector, and its input has been valued and welcomed. That input and involvement will be further strengthened with the addition of representatives who will be elected by the community network, and the five 'diversity' places available.

There is an issue about the timescales to which the LSP works: the key message of 'don't rush it' which came from the original conference in November 2000 still applies, and partners need a realistic amount of time to respond to issues or conduct tasks.

But the community and voluntary sector has been given the opportunity to be fully involved in the LSP, and that is welcome.

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What is the community and voluntary sector?

Arriving at a simple definition or description of the community and voluntary sector is not easy; some organisations have registered charitable status but many do not, some operate as registered Companies, others do not. The diversity of size and status is reflected too in the activities of the community and voluntary sector that has always performed a wide range of roles within society. Some organisations represent areas, some represent particular groups of people, others are issue based.

The community and voluntary sector is a very diverse range of independent organisations, from small community groups organised by local activists and volunteers, to national or even international organisations with divisions of professional paid staff. The LSP should seek to achieve the best possible involvement, consultation, representation and communication with the community and voluntary sector. Key roles played by this sector include:

Representative and advocate - as representatives for a particular group of individuals, or representatives of a particular group of individuals, or through encouraging and enabling their members and users to speak for themselves, and identify their own solutions.

Campaigner - a local parent and toddlers group arguing the need for a pedestrian crossing, or a major national organisation campaigning on developing world debt. Even small campaigning groups may have a major impact on public policy.

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Expert - through their developed wealth of expertise in a wide range of different fields.

Provider of advice, information and support - for example helplines, publications and publicity campaigns. Some voluntary organisations also take an active role in training and education.

Innovator and provider of services - including services to the most excluded communities. Innovations in this sector often develop into major public service provision and activity (eg in relation to AIDS)

Partner or contractor - through contractual arrangement to deliver activities or services. There are a growing number of partnership initiatives involving voluntary organisations - indeed many government initiatives or funding programmes require partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector.

Catalyst - the community and voluntary sector has the advantage of being in a position to link a wide range of stakeholders including communities of place and interest. A voluntary organisation may not have resources to undertake a particular project itself, but its ideas and support may encourage another local partner to do so.

Co-ordinator – infrastructure bodies and networks keep organisations up to date with information and enable joint project and other types of work.

Identifying needs – through their day to day work community and voluntary sector organisations, like advice and legal services, identify changing needs of the local communities they serve.

Not all organisations will take on all these roles, but many organisations will combine two or more roles, for example service provision and advocacy. There is a continual process of the formation and closing down of organisations, particularly small community groups. Old established groups have a turnover in activists and staff. As a result there is a need to continually refresh information to ensure the best possible links into communities.

Many of the people taking on the role of representing their organisations are volunteers and unpaid activists. They have to cope with difficult pressures between different commitments – to their organisations, to their families and often to their work. Meetings should not be overloaded with paperwork that they may not have time to read. Meetings should not be held at short notice making it difficult for them to attend.

Impact of the community and voluntary sector

The sector plays an important social and economic role that should not be under-estimated. The sector is a large employer, utilising service contracts and other funding arrangements to offer paid and flexible work across a diverse range of specialisms. It supports more excluded people into opportunities to develop confidence and demonstrate their key skills (so encouraging moves into mainstream economic activity). Many jobs in the sector are local, impacting on the sustainability and the local environment. Its services are often preventative, so reducing the costs of social support and care in the public sector. Community groups and voluntary organisations can help build confident communities, ready to seek influence with

institutions and decision-makers, so enhancing the democratic well-being of communities and the wider society.

Working with the community and voluntary sector

In contributing to the development of an inclusive LSP the local authority should build on existing good practice in working with the community and voluntary sector. There may be a local compact or other form of agreement, including those developed for specialist partnerships. Such agreements can be an extremely helpful mechanism in terms of the LSP.

There may have been a mapping exercise of the voluntary and community sector to identify potential partners and help the council to scope the size and nature of the undertakings it should be making. This will have helped to define the diversity of the voluntary and community sector in the locality, including the range of BME organisations. Local agreements that have set out negotiated commitments on both sides on issues such as funding, consultation and review will have done the groundwork for involvement in the LSP. Where no agreements exist, the LSP should provide the ideal opportunity to begin discussions.

Guidance on developing an LSP - and guidelines on developing a local compact - both refer to the need to ensure that local faith groups are among those involved. Experience shows that the *process* of producing local agreements is as important and influential as the final document itself and this will also apply to developing an LSP. As the previous advice note set out, time spent in getting to know partners will reap great benefits. This could be particularly true where the council has not had a particularly well developed relationship with the faith groups and communities in the locality.

Community and voluntary sector infrastructure

Community and voluntary organisations need a support infrastructure in order to:

- access and share national, regional and local information;
- develop ways of co-operating to avoid unnecessary competition and duplication and develop joint projects; and
- discuss policy matters of common concern and to make collective representations about these concerns to local authorities, other public agencies and central government.

In most local authority areas there are infrastructure support organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service, which are sometimes known by other names, for example, as 'Voluntary Action (name of town/borough)' and Rural Community Councils. There can also be a range of specialist organisations such as advice service and community care alliances/fora. New infrastructure networks develop as new needs emerge eg among organisations active in regeneration or supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

All these infrastructure methods require resources and this will be particularly so if they are to have a role in the LSP. The funding of appropriate infrastructure organisations and networks will need consideration by local authorities and other public agencies. LSPs should 'get to know' about the strengths and gaps in, and learn how to listen to, the sector's infrastructure organisations.

Other mechanisms for involvement in the LSP

Ensuring the LSP is inclusive could indicate that a huge, partnership body will be needed, but it should be noted that membership of the strategic decision making group will not be the only way to contribute to the LSPs work. Theme groups, sub groups, complementary partnerships and forums will also provide opportunities for a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations to contribute. Community level solutions in rural areas in particular require holistic, not functional, discussion and action plans.

Decision-making and executive bodies

The government guidance talks about LSPs being non-statutory, non-executive organisations operating at a level which enable strategic decisions to be taken. The local government white paper (December 2001) states that local partners are best placed to decide how to achieve the effective involvement of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. It goes on to say that the detailed structure, membership, and geographical coverage of LSPs should be determined locally.

Case study
Cherwell Community Planning Partnership

Type of authority: district council
Region: south east
Other details: rural authority, not a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

The Cherwell Community Planning Partnership has been in existence since December 2000 and, as its name suggests, developed from a partnership that was formed to establish a community plan.

Setting up the partnership

Cherwell District Council took the lead role in setting up the partnership.

Structure

Cherwell Community Planning Partnership does not have an executive, so all partners are involved in collective decision-making. The partnership does have themed sub-groups. Currently there is just one in existence, dealing with consultation. Seven voluntary and community sector partners are involved in this sub-group.

The partnership is currently considering how it formally delegates work to the partners: in the interim the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) has undertaken some small projects on behalf of the partnership.

Resources

The partnership as a whole meets every one or two months, and the chief executive of Cherwell District Council currently chairs it.

Cherwell District Council also provides the secretariat function for the partnership.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

Cherwell Community Planning Partnership currently has a total of 23 members. Three of these are voluntary or community sector bodies:

Oxfordshire Rural Community Council;
Kidlington Voice;
Voluntary Organisation Forum (represented by the Banbury and District CVS).

The Cherwell area is not eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding or, therefore, for the Community Empowerment Fund. However, Cherwell District Council has made a contribution of £189,000 grant aid to community associations and voluntary organisations, as well as providing in kind support for the Cherwell Voluntary Forum. This forum was set up by the CVS in partnership with the council. All voluntary organisations are invited to participate, and it meets at least twice a year.

The local strategic partnership itself is currently considering the possibility of contributing funds to enable the voluntary and community sector to participate more fully. There is recognition of the need to support voluntary and community sector participation.

The partnership has ensured representation of black and minority ethnic groups in particular by giving them direct input into the development of the community plan, as well as membership of the voluntary organisations forum, attendance at partnership events, and the provision of some grant aid.

Relationships

Cherwell Community Planning Partnership is the umbrella for all local neighbourhood-based partnerships.

The partnership uses *Cherwell Link*, the council's magazine, to report its progress to the community. This is delivered to every household in the area, three times a year.

Links with community and voluntary groups who are not directly on the partnership are encouraged through stakeholder events (one-day conventions to which stakeholders other than the partners are invited) and public meetings. The local CVS newsletter keeps the wider voluntary sector informed of the partnership's work, every two months. Other community and voluntary groups were also invited to comment on the draft community plan, along with 54,000 households in the local area.

Role of councillors

Councillors attend all the regular Voluntary Forum meetings. In addition, several local voluntary and community organisations have a councillor on their executive committee or steering group.

Overall local authority perspective

The cornerstone of the partnership's draft community plan has been the involvement and contribution from the large number of community and voluntary organisations in Cherwell, along with feedback from thousands of residents.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

A good start has been made in involving the community and voluntary sector: the partnership is now learning how to make this involvement more effective and timely.

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Case study
Devon Strategic Partnership

Type of authority: county council
Region: south west
Other details: not a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

The Devon Strategic Partnership is a newly established local strategic partnership (LSP), which is being developed to take forward partnership working in Devon, and to produce the Devon Community Strategy. Work to establish the partnership has taken place over the past year. Devon Strategic Partnership has been established to:

- improve the quality of life of people living in Devon, by ensuring the work of all agencies and groups has the needs of local people at its core;
- address all aspects of Devon life, across public, private and voluntary sector. Dependent on the issue to be tackled it will ensure all interested parties are brought together.

It has agreed a set of principles that members are signed up to, and against which all the business will be tested. The eight districts in Devon have also developed LSPs. Close working links between the partnerships are a priority to avoid duplication of effort and ensure the needs of local communities are met.

Setting up the partnership

A small steering group, chaired by the Bishop of Exeter, has been involved in setting up Devon Strategic Partnership. This group has included members from the county council, health authority, police, regional development agency, Government Office of the South West, private sector and voluntary sector. The group organised a conference in September 2001, to which a broad range of stakeholders were invited, to discuss the setting up of the partnership. The same group has also worked towards the first meeting of the executive body, known as the partnership forum, to be held in March 2002.

Structure

The partnership as a whole is made up of over 100 organisations and agencies. There is a smaller partnership forum, which will act as the executive body. The partnership forum is accountable to the local strategic partnership as a whole: the LSP will receive progress reports and updates, and set the forum's work plan, at an annual conference.

The partnership forum will assess priorities, and make sure any barriers are removed, so that all the necessary partners are engaged to find solutions and to enable real progress to be made. Membership of the forum will be by nomination and will include representatives from all sectors. Each district LSP is represented on the forum.

Time and task limited groups will be commissioned by the partnership forum, with delegated authority to lead partnership projects and recommend action.

The early priorities that task groups will be working on are:

- developing voluntary and community sector infrastructure – to define roles and functions of the sector, identify gaps in provision, develop proposals for investment and make recommendations to ensure there is a sustainable infrastructure in Devon;
- reducing domestic violence – by developing a multi-agency policy and strategy;
- the way forward for rural Devon – developing a rural strategy for Devon building on the Foot and Mouth Recovery Plan;
- planning better services for vulnerable children and young people – setting up a partnership to integrate services to vulnerable young people;
- energy efficiency;
- neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion – a policy framework across Devon;
- improving take-up of welfare benefits – this entails a benefits take-up campaign across all districts, which is being co-ordinated centrally.

Resources

The Bishop of Exeter is currently chairing the partnership, until a nomination ballot prior to the second Partnership conference in September.

Devon County Council provide and fund the secretariat function for the partnership and county partnership officers act as facilitators on the task groups.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

All local agencies and groups are invited to join the LSP. While many wish in principle to join immediately, others wish to become involved when they have a specific interest. In this way Devon Strategic Partnership will evolve and grow.

A wide range of voluntary and community sector bodies were represented at the conference in September. Devon County Council has a local compact with the voluntary and community sector, and the chair of the compact was involved in the steering group that has set up the partnership.

A total of twelve voluntary and community sector bodies have been invited to make nominations to the partnership forum:

- community council;
- disability group;
- elderly group;
- faith groups (two of them);
- lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual group;
- National Association for Citizens Advice Bureaux;
- race group;
- trade union;
- women's group;
- Working Together for Devon Partnership – a voluntary and community sector compact;
- a young persons' group.

Devon is not eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund/Community Empowerment Fund. The county council is currently establishing a corporate budget to support the Councils for Voluntary Service and Volunteer Bureaux in each district, to reflect their enhanced role in local strategic partnerships. The Devon Strategic Partnership task group on developing voluntary and community sector infrastructure will take this further by exploring the relationship between countywide and district-based organisations.

In addition, Devon County Council is currently re-negotiating service level agreements with both countywide and district-based organisations to reflect the development of community planning and the Devon Strategic Partnership. Also, the county council maintains the office for the Working Together for Devon Partnership.

Devon Strategic Partnership is currently discussing ways of resourcing the voluntary and community sectors' involvement in the conference, forum and task groups.

Relationships

All the district LSPs have nominated a representative onto the partnership forum, and there is also a representative from the Association of Town and Parish Councils.

Devon Strategic Partnership plans to conduct a MORI survey in 2002 asking local people how they would like services to improve, and what they want Devon to look like in the future. This information will be used to inform the community strategy and the work plan of the partnership. Results of the survey will be fed back to local people.

Those community and voluntary groups who are on the Partnership Forum are encouraged to consult and communicate with those groups who are not on the forum. The task groups will also involve members from the voluntary and community sector more widely.

Role of councillors

Three of the eight LSPs have nominated a councillor to the partnership forum. The county council has two members on the forum. Local members will also chair and be members of task groups.

Overall local authority perspective

The partnership is in the early stages of development, but everyone agrees the importance of having a wide community and voluntary sector representation on the forum. Community and voluntary sector involvement promises to be crucial to informing a 'vision' of Devon that reflects the priorities of local people.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

The voluntary and community sector has contacts with all sectors of society, is a vital part of the whole infrastructure of the county, and supports many aspects and levels of need in the community. It is often taken for granted, but if these sectors were not there, cracks would quickly appear in the infrastructure, and there would be a knock on effect for service providers.

Being part of Devon Strategic Partnership is important, not least in the opportunities it provides to talk to partners, make links and find areas where we can work together for the people of Devon.

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LSPs must be both inclusive and able to reach agreements and make decisions. LSPs are collaborative partnerships where each member is an equal partner. They will not succeed if one or a small number of partners is perceived as dominant. Individual partners will remain responsible and accountable for decisions on their services and resources. They should provide a forum for debate, discussion, and common decision-making.

As part of their remit to improve public services, LSPs will be making a range of decisions, about such matters as:

- membership;
- terms of reference;
- servicing arrangements;
- the community strategy;
- publicising their work;
- mechanisms for keeping all partners informed and engaged;
- delegating detailed work to specialist groups; and
- requests for action by specific public agencies and specialist partners.

There is a tension between the need for being inclusive of all partners in decision-making, and the difficulties involved in reaching quick decisions in large groups. There is also a tricky tight-rope to be walked between taking decisions through consensus that move forward the process of implementing the community and neighbourhood renewal strategies and improving the delivery of public services and at the same time requiring partners to take specific actions.

Three responses are emerging in the development of LSPs, especially where they are being developed out of existing partnerships:

- involvement of all partners in decision-making;
- small groups involving a number of partners that can take decisions; and
- groups that provide advice and guidance to the full partnership.

The involvement of all partners is seen by many as unwieldy especially if the number of partners is large. Where the smaller groups are taking executive decisions these can be seen by those partners not involved as being 'exclusive', and devaluing their equal status.

One way of tackling this problem is to identify other methods of involving different types of organisation and perspectives eg through theme groups of the LSP, community forums and area forums.

Bearing in mind the central principles of inclusivity and consensus, before steering or executive groups are established there should be a discussion in the full partnership about whether there is consensus on the need for a small advisory or decision-making group. If there is no agreement then there will need to be further discussion about how decision-making mechanisms can be improved at meetings of the full partnership. The local authority committee method can be particularly off-putting for people who are not used to it. Different partners may use different methods that could be useful to the

LSP. Some of the group work techniques of community participation could be used enabling people to consider the issues in smaller groups and then coming back together again for final decision-making.

If there is agreement on the need for a small advisory or decision making group, then the initial discussion in the full partnership will help reach a decision as to what is the appropriate name for it (eg advisory, steering, executive) and the safeguards needed to preserve the openness, inclusivity and transparency of the LSP process. Safeguards might include:

- each specialist sector in the partnership being represented (including the community and voluntary sector);
- clarity about what decision-making powers are being delegated;
- decisions that do not have unanimity being referred back to the full partnership;
- members of the smaller group having a right of veto on action in the event of disagreement ;
- all partners receiving in advance the papers of the smaller group so that they have an opportunity to make comment;
- all partners having the right to attend meetings of the smaller group as observers, with speaking but not voting rights;
- speedy communication of all decisions to all partners after meetings of the smaller group;
- having the chair appointed by the full partnership so that s/he is accountable back to the full partnership;
- specifying sector category membership, with any changes to be approved by the full partnership identified, and the sector category representative being chosen by the sector;
- limiting the amount of emergency business to ensure that all full partners receive advance notice;
- using 'Any Other Business' to draw attention to an issue, but not allowing decisions to be taken until all partners have been briefed; and
- in the event of a disagreement between the group and the full partnership, or between some of the partners, provision for mediation or having a rule that the decision of the full partnership is final and binding.

why should councillors be involved in LSPs?

The government guidance on LSPs states that councillors set the strategic direction of the council's services and are therefore in a position to ensure that the interests of the local community come first. The guidance goes on to state that councillors should be properly included in the LSP process and committed to delivering their part of any agreed strategies or action plans.

As democratically elected representatives, councillors have an important leadership and representational role in their communities. Councillors act as advocates, community leaders and a voice for local communities. They can be described as 'local champions'.

As 'local champions' councillors undertake the following roles:

Signposting - councillors know how the system works and who to contact. They are well-placed to advise local people about local issues, explain the 'system' to local people and point them in the right direction.

Monitoring - councillors can help local people make progress by overseeing and intervening on their behalf - the Local Government Act 2000 provides a role for non-executive councillors in monitoring and influencing the delivery of all services being provided in an area.

Acting as advocates - councillors have the necessary status, skills and abilities to tackle failure. When things break down or go wrong councillors, as elected representatives, are well placed to intervene and seek redress on behalf of local people – in particular, councillors have an important role in mediating at the neighbourhood level.

Representing - councillors can spot emerging issues and trends. They will know when a series of individual issues indicates that there is a real failure in the system that needs to be taken up the council itself and they can feed views into the local authority.

Promoting the area – councillors have a role in promoting the area both to residents and to people living outside the area.

Councillors need to play a key role in LSPs, particularly given their unique community leadership remit. However, at the same time, it should be recognised that councillors are not the only representatives of local communities. Councillors must work together with community and voluntary sector representatives as well as with local people to develop and deliver action plans based on local priorities. This will require new ways of working and developing new relationships based on trust and openness. This may take time to develop, but if the right approach is adopted from the beginning of the process, this should help the development of effective working relationships.

Case study
Manchester Local Strategic Partnership

Type of authority: metropolitan council
Region: north west
Other details: a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authority

Description and background

Manchester's local strategic partnership (LSP) is a completely new partnership. It has been formally operational since January 2002, following a consultation period between June and December 2001.

Setting up the partnership

Manchester City Council led the setting up of the LSP. A widespread consultation process was undertaken to inform the local residents and groups of the proposals for the LSP and invite their feedback. This included such activities as broadcasts on local radio stations and discussion forums on the 'community portals' of local websites, as well as more traditional methods, like circulating the LSP consultation document. The formation of the Community Network for Manchester was one of the ways the community and voluntary sector was involved in the consultation process.

Structure

Manchester Local Strategic Partnership is a multi-layered structure, consisting of:

- an all-inclusive Manchester Conference,
- a steering group, which sets the strategic development and is the main decision-making body for the Partnership;
- a support and delivery group, which seeks to engage key public agencies in a commitment to work together in support of the strategic direction set by the Manchester Community Strategy and LSP steering group;
- thematic partnerships/working groups and area-based partnerships, which deliver the priorities of the community strategy and LSP steering group.

The steering group sets the strategic direction for the partnership, building on views and issues raised at the Manchester Conference. It is responsible for making key decisions on the allocation of resources; overseeing the delivery of the community strategy; agreeing a range of local initiatives to tackle social exclusion and inequality; and reviewing partnership arrangements to allow public services to be delivered more effectively. The steering group will be setting up a series of thematic partnerships and working groups to take forward the priorities identified by the group and the community strategy, and will also be responsible for overseeing the establishment of a code of practice for the partnership, including a coherent consultation framework for engaging and listening to the views of local stakeholders. The thematic working groups identified so far, but (with the exception of the crime and disorder partnership) yet to be set up, relate to the themes of the community strategy for Manchester:

- economic competitiveness and local employment;
- children and young people;
- housing;
- crime and disorder;
- health;
- transport;
- culture.

The LSP support and delivery group is an officer group that services the partnership, and ensures the commitment of the key public sector agencies to the decisions of the steering group. Implementation of the priorities of the community strategy and the LSP steering group will fall to the thematic partnerships, and also to local area partnerships.

Each part of the LSP structure is inter-related and fundamental to the success of the partnership. Membership of the steering group is therefore one of a number of ways for organisations to be involved in the LSP.

Resources

The Manchester Conference is likely to be held annually, and the steering group is expected to meet at least quarterly, although as it is new it will meet more frequently in the early stages. The support and delivery group will meet monthly for at least the first six months, and the thematic and area-based partnerships meet as and when required.

The leader of the council was elected as chair of the steering group for the first year at its inaugural meeting in February 2002. Currently, the city council provides and funds the secretariat function, but this may be shared in future, as the partnership becomes more established.

The costs of the widespread consultation process on the LSP were met by the city council, as were those involved in staging the first Manchester Conference, which was free to all participants.

Voluntary and community sector involvement

Of the 41 places on the steering group, which is the executive body of the partnership, over a quarter (11 of them) are from the voluntary or community sector:

- Community Network for Manchester (responsible for nominating eight voluntary and community sector places);
- Manchester Council for Community Relations (one place);
- Manchester Young People's Council (two places).

Efforts have been made to ensure that the steering group is as representative as possible of businesses, key public agencies and voluntary and community organisations. The Community Network for Manchester is being given a key role in identifying a balanced range of representatives for the steering group from across the community and voluntary sector, including black and minority ethnic communities and other 'hard to reach' groups. Five elected members of the council are also included on the steering group, giving further representation to Manchester residents. The private sector is also represented on the steering group through a number of 'umbrella' organisations.

A much larger number of voluntary and community sector representatives are involved in the wider partnership, as part of the support and delivery group, thematic working groups or local area partnerships.

Manchester is a Neighbourhood Renewal area, and resources from the Community Empowerment Fund are being used to develop the Community Network for Manchester. The Voluntary Sector Support Agencies Network (VSSAN) is leading this work. The city council has also been closely involved in its development, and provided support in the form of staff input, advice and presentations at meetings and seminars. The council has also provided a bridging loan to Manchester Community Pride Initiative, the organisation leading the development of the network on behalf of VSSAN, to enable development work to be carried out in advance of Community Empowerment Fund resources being released from the government office.

The North West Objective 2 programme also provides resources to support capacity building activities (through Priority 2) and, as such, has the capacity to add value to government funding such as the Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chest resources. The Manchester Community Network will be instrumental in weighing up and using such opportunities to further develop their activities, and working with existing local partnership structures to ensure that they are connected into other activities within the locality. The Manchester Local Strategic Partnership steering group will be responsible for approving the use of Objective 2 resources for these kinds of activities.

Relationships

There is considerable involvement of local neighbourhood-based partnerships in the LSP. The area-based partnerships (for example, New Deal for Communities and Single Regeneration Budget partnerships, ward co-ordination groups and crime and disorder local action partnerships) form one of the layers of the LSP structure. They play a key part in implementation of the priorities of the community strategy and the partnership. In addition, they feed local views and experience into the steering and support and delivery groups, to make sure that strategies and targets are grounded in community needs and aspirations.

The local partnerships also provide structures for communication to and from local communities and the LSP steering group. Alongside this, Manchester Community Network's geographical and thematic networks are used to report to the community. In addition, the steering group is now responsible for overseeing the development of a coherent consultation and communication framework, which may enhance the ways in which Manchester Local Strategic Partnership engages and listens to the views of local stakeholders.

Links with community and voluntary groups who are not directly on the partnership are encouraged through the Community Network, as well as through the thematic and area-based partnerships. In addition, the annual Manchester Conference is open to all local stakeholders, and provides an opportunity for communication and debate, and for setting the agenda and agreeing the strategies and targets for the LSP.

Manchester City Council, in collaboration with VSSAN, has already developed a local compact with the voluntary and community sector. One of the key actions in Manchester Local Strategic Partnership's first year action plan is the establishment of a code of working practice for the LSP. As part of this, consideration will be given to extending the voluntary sector compact to cover all public sector organisations and umbrella groups working within the LSP structure.

Role of councillors

Five elected members are on the steering group, and work with the voluntary and community sector representatives. In addition, a number of councillors may be part of the thematic working groups, and are already part of local area partnerships (such as ward co-ordination groups and area regeneration partnerships), and so work with the voluntary and community sector through these structures.

Overall local authority perspective

Manchester City Council greatly welcomes the development of a local strategic partnership for the city, and the contribution that the community and voluntary sector can play within it.

Significant efforts have been made to establish an LSP for Manchester that involves the community and voluntary sector as widely as possible, and ensures that they have an effective level of representation.

There have been some tensions involved in engaging the community and voluntary sector, particularly in terms of the level of representation on the LSP steering and support and delivery groups. A number of voluntary and community sector partners have requested an equal level of representation with the public sector (in terms of the number of places). This is not felt to be appropriate by some other partners, who think the contribution that each member can make to the partnership is important, rather than simply the number of representatives. It is also felt that the important contribution that the community and voluntary sector can make at the thematic and local partnership level has not always been fully recognised. There is obviously a lot more work to be done to resolve such issues

and ensure full involvement of the sector, but it is felt that a good base has been established which can be taken forward as the partnership develops and the relationship with the Community Network is cemented.

Overall voluntary sector perspective

The Manchester Local Strategic Partnership represents a significant opportunity for closer working between the voluntary and community sector and other public and private agencies. It is also an opportunity for developing a more strategic approach across the sector itself.

The Community Network for Manchester builds upon work by the VSSAN to establish a more effective 'communications infrastructure' for the sector. It is intended to be both comprehensive and strategic, divided into seven geographical networks and 22 'communities of interest'. In this sense it is a network of existing networks, but seeks to prioritise those normally excluded from strategic decision-making and develop a 'representative' core group known as the Community Network Strategy Group: this group will guide involvement in the LSP processes. It also builds upon on-going work to establish and implement a local compact with the local authority.

Initially, misunderstanding was caused by the failure of the local authority to 'nvolve the sector in early deliberations about the formation of the LSP. The sector first became involved at the 'consultation stage' when plans were already well formed. The sector held its own consultation event and submitted a report on the LSP proposals, containing a series of 12 recommendations. Each of these recommendations has been addressed and some significant changes have been made to the LSP process as a result. These include:

- the ability for the Community Network to select its own eight LSP steering group participants from a pool of 15 who can attend meetings;
- the provision for a 'Community and Resident Engagement Strategy' for all aspects of the LSP;
- a more integrated approach to the 'Learning and Development Programme' for the LSP;
- a more explicit focus on tackling poverty and social exclusion;
- a commitment to a full consultation process concerning plans for a Manchester Regeneration Fund.

In the course of these recent discussions, a good working relationship has been developed between the sector and the local authority. This, and the success of the emerging Community Network, forms the foundation for genuine and constructive partnership working through the LSP.

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How can councillors be involved in LSPs?

The experience to date of LSPs in development shows that councillors are very much involved. Different practices are emerging. The following provide some examples of councillor involvement in LSPs but these are not mutually exclusive:

- executive councillors represented on the executive body of the LSP;
- councillors (executive and non-executive) represented on sub-groups (policy themes or area based) of the LSP;
- the leader of the council acting as chair of the LSP;
- councillors (executive and non-executive) acting as chairs or members of sub-groups; and
- councillors represented on community forums which feed into the LSP.

Different practices are emerging regarding the number of people on the LSP. In some cases, there is an executive body with sub-groups and/or community forums to encourage wider community involvement. There is no one model regarding the number of people on the LSP – what is important is that there is a real opportunity for councillors to demonstrate their community leadership without undermining the input of community and voluntary sector groups. Both councillors and representatives of the community and voluntary sector should be represented on the main LSP, or executive body of the LSP.

In considering the involvement of councillors in LSPs, account should be taken of their role in other groups, including for example, tenants associations, and community and voluntary sector groups. Through involvement in other groups locally, there is an opportunity to engage councillors (often non-executive councillors) who are not on the main LSP, or executive body of the LSP, in the work of the LSP. Councillors are often involved in the decision-making or consultative processes of other agencies.

Councillors who are members of LSPs and those who are not should both have an opportunity to work with other sectors in developing the local neighbourhood renewal strategy. This work could be conducted through direct membership of the LSP, through indirect involvement in the LSP via sub-groups, through general involvement with groups in the area and through membership of neighbourhood based partnerships.

working with the community and voluntary sectors in the 88 areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

The government has made special arrangements to improve the quality of life in the 88 most deprived urban and rural areas in England. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) is intended to help local service providers to improve services to people living in these areas.

Authorities are expected to show how the NRF is helping to meet the national floor targets relating to education, employment, health, crime and housing. However, the NRF can also be used to reach locally agreed targets that underpin neighbourhood renewal, such as community development and involving local communities in decisions about public services.

Urban Forum research shows that for 2001/2, local authorities have exercised much discretion on spending NRF, with limited consultation with local community and voluntary groups. One reason for this is the fact that LSPs have been in an early stage of development in 2001/2. However, from April 2002 local authorities will have to show that they are working in collaboration with an LSP accredited by their regional Government Office (GO) before receiving NRF.

The government has also made funding available for residents, community and voluntary groups in these 88 areas to get involved in LSPs and neighbourhood renewal through the Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) and Community Chests, available for three years from 2001/2. This funding is for additional work and Government Guidance forbids its use as replacement funding for local authority or other public sector funding to the community and voluntary sectors.

LSP Accreditation by Government Offices in the regions

As a condition of the NRF, each LSP from the 88 areas is required to carry out a self-assessment before submitting their plans to their regional GO. This must involve all partners on the LSP. GOs have assessed LSPs against agreed criteria before deciding whether to accredit the LSP. Each LSP has had to show that it has effectively consulted community and voluntary groups, as well as the main service providers and the wider community. Each LSP will also need to demonstrate community involvement in drawing up a local neighbourhood renewal strategy.

As part of the accreditation process GOs will do a 'reality check' on what LSP partners are telling them by consulting local community and voluntary groups and other key stakeholders. Each LSP should ensure that if any group is unhappy with the way that the LSP is working, they could raise it with a named person on the LSP. As a last resort, concerns will go to the regional GO to investigate.

Community Empowerment Fund (CEF)

Government introduced CEF in 2001/2 to help local community and voluntary sector groups to be effective players in LSPs in the 88 areas. CEF is being allocated directly from GOs to a local 'community network' of community and voluntary groups that reflects the diversity of the sector locally.

CEF can be spent on a range of activities agreed by the community network with the GO. Examples include communications, research, training and supporting LSP representatives.

Where possible, the community network will build upon existing local umbrella bodies for community and voluntary groups, such as voluntary and community sector forums or Councils for Voluntary Service. Local residents, black and minority ethnic groups, community groups from deprived neighbourhoods and 'communities of interests' will all need to be involved if the community network is to be effective and inclusive.

Community Chests

Also in the 88 areas, neighbourhood renewal 'Community Chests' will help local community and voluntary groups to access small grants (up to £5,000) to support various activities at neighbourhood level. Overall, the intention is to increase practical and community-led involvement in neighbourhood renewal at the very local level.

Community Chest funds will be allocated by the regional GO to a 'funding agency' in each of the 88 areas, before being released as small grants. Application forms will be short and simple to complete.

Community Learning Chests

Community Learning Chests will be available for residents in the 88 areas eligible for the NRF from April 2002. These are small grants of up to £5,000 that will fund:

- bursaries to attend training courses;
- an on-site training course for members of neighbourhood partnerships;
- the costs of buying in practice; and
- visits to explore good practice.

A total of £10m will be available over the three-year programme and applications will be made through the existing community chest programme.

Research and development

Urban Forum is running a government sponsored national project to research, develop and support community and voluntary sector involvement in LSPs, community strategies and neighbourhood renewal.

bassac

The British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres builds a network of multi-purpose community organisations supporting the diverse needs of local people.

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BNRRN

The Black Neighbourhood Renewal and Regeneration Network is a project supported by the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations and works with private, public and third sector partnerships to find solutions to social exclusion, stimulating entrepreneurship, economic development and neighbourhood renewal in black and minority ethnic communities.

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NACVS (National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service)

NACVS is the growing network of over 300 CVS thoughout England. NACVS helps to promote effective voluntary and community action through its member CVS by providing them with a range of support services and by acting as a national voice for the local voluntary and community sector.

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Urban Forum

An umbrella body for community and voluntary groups with interests in urban policy and regional policy.

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VOSCUR

The Voluntary Organisations Standing Conference on Urban Regeneration is the CVS for Bristol, supporting local community and voluntary groups and community enterprises, with a focus on 'having a say' in formal partnerships developing and regenerating Bristol's diverse communities.

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Background reading

Further information on neighbourhood renewal and the development of local strategic partnerships from a community sector perspective can be obtained from the above organisations.

Details of the government policy can be found on the website of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit at www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/partnerships/index.htm

Details of LGA publications can be found at www.lga.gov.uk

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